DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 659 PS 019 849

AUTHOR Ford, Debra L.
TITLE Parental Participation and Academic Achievement.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Aspiration; Catholic Schools; Children; *Elementary School Students; *Family School Relationship; Grade 3; Grade 4; Intermediate Grades; *Parent Participation; Parent Role; Parents; *Parent Student Relationship; Primary Education; Student Attitudes; *Student Motivation
IDENTIFIERS Illinois (Chicago); Parent Expectations; Student Expectations

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study that aimed to identify parental academic achievement and participation in their children's school as the primary motivators for children's academic achievement. Participants included 213 third and fourth graders from a Catholic School in Chicago. Two groups were randomly selected from records provided by the school. Subjects in Group A were students whose parents participated in school activities at least 90% of the school year, and subjects in Group B were students whose parents did not participate in school activities. Achievement tests were administered to each group. Scores indicated that Group A and Group B were equivalent in reading and mathematics skills. The data supports the null hypothesis that the academic achievement of students whose parents participate in school activities will not differ significantly from that of students whose parents do not participate. A review of the literature on parental participation and student achievement is included. Appended are 23 references. (GLR)

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PARENTAL PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Debra L. Ford

In the past, history has generally recorded each generation of people performing at a higher level than their ancestors. Man has continued to strive and build on the successes of his forefathers. Today, "A Nation at risk", tells us that the future generation will not excel academically as well as their parents.

Certainly, one must conclude that parents are generally the most influential figures in their children lives. Quite often parents have tried to re-live their lives within the lives of their children. Many children have pursued various professions for the sole reason being "the desire of the parent". But, the question, "does parental past academic achievements affect the achievement of their children "?, has not prompted a significant amount of research on this issue.

The significance of this study is to identify parental academic achievement and school participation as the primary motivator for their children academic achievements and accomplishments. The parent, as the most integral significant other in the child's life is indeed his first motivator, advisor and counselor. Is this role so potent that the child is drawn by the past achievement of his/her parent and becomes dutifully motivated to achieve at expectation of the parent? Does today's modern youth strive for success based upon the past accomplishments of the parent?

Parental aspirations for their children to "have more", "achieve higher", and to be more successful than themselves are humanly innate traits. This study seeks to identify the parental achievement and participation coupled with high aspiration and expectation for the child's academic achievement as the prime motivator for successful academic achievements and accomplishments. The relationship of parental academic successes and failures must be taken into consideration when exploring the cause and the reason behind the child's academic achievements or failures.

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Child development theorist have emphasized the role of parental influences upon the child's behavior. Many parents have attempted to relive their lives within the lives of their children. Children have been, and continue to be affected by parental achievements and accomplishment. Various researches have concluded that parental involvement and participation have been instrumental in the academic successes of their offsprings. Several studies that compared different levels of involvement in experimental school programs find that the children whose parents are most involved make the greatest gains(Anselmo, 1977). These studies were based upon the effect on student achievement of introducing a general parent involvement program. However, Coletta (1977) that in the federal Emergency School Aid, Follow through, and Title I programs, and in the California Early Childhood Education program, where parents can play significant roles as paraprofessionals, decision makers, tutors, volunteers, observers, or learners themselves, student achievement seems to vary directly with the level of parent involvement. Neither study mentioned the socialization of parent and faculty that carries the possibilities that when parents are highly visible at school, these children tend to receive individualize and special attention from the faculty; thus academic achievements are realized.

Former school board members often have received copies of tests prior to their children taking them. Certainly, parents visibility and participation are rewarding for their children, in the respect, he/she is known by the staff because of the parent's involvement with the school. Parents participation in the school are often rewarded by first hand recipients of old text books; good rapport with the faculty and current events of the school.

Henderson's 1981 annotation of 37 research reports provides evidence regarding the effects of parental involvement of student achievement in elementary and secondary education. The annotation covers the period of 1966 through 1980, that analyzed such variables as family background, and socio-economocial status, parent powerlessness, parents' expectations of their children academic achievement, family and student self-image, educational activities in the home, and parents involvement in parent-teacher associations and other in-school activities. The author concluded that the form of parental involvement in education, whether in or out of school, is not important as long as the involvement is well planned, comprehensive, and long-lasting and serves to integrate students' experiences at school with those at home.

Gordon & Breivogel (1977) identified three important family influences that seen to determine achievement: 1) students' and parents' expectations for academic performance, 2) the extent to which they engaged in activities to support these expectations, and 3) the student's attitude toward hard work as necessary to success.

These influences were based upon the Coleman's report of 1966. Coleman concluded that family background is the most important factor in a child's education. Kenningson, (1977) also reexamined Coleman's report and found that schools with an active PTA chapter had higher average student achievement, regardless of their social background.

Certainly, from these studies, one can make the argument that parental involvement produces student participation in school and promotes academic achievement. When parents show a strong interest in their children's schooling, they promote the development of attitudes that are key to achievement, attitudes that are more a product of how the family interacts than of its social class or incomes. Mowry, (1972) found that children in programs where parent involvement was "high" (i.e where they were active in all roles) showed the greatest gains.

Stearns, (1973) developed an excellent diagram to outline how parent involvement fits into the motivational process that impels a child to learn.

Bronfenbrenner, (1974), has found from his own research and from reviewing others' that long-term gains in cognitive growth can be achieved by early intervention only if the mothers become actively involved in their children's learning. Programs of preschool enrichment that just treat the children and do not bring the mothers into play, are ineffective. Norma (1972) also found the same thing at the Ypsilanti, Michigan program. Gordon's (1976) study of a long-term parent education program in Florida found that children who had been in the group for two-three years, beginning when they were only a few month old, were still scoring higher than control group children when they reached third grade.

Recent research alluded that if the parent involvement is comprehensive and long-lasting and preferably if it is begun at an early age, academic success will be realized(Henderson, 1981). Martinez (1981), broaden his conclusion of the parent involvement with five variables that are essential for the production of academic achievement. However, Martinez stressed that the variables must be operated on jointly: 1) verbal interaction, 2) total size of family, 3) which parent handles the money, 4) number of hours spent reading with the child and 5) parental aspirations. Martinez based his conclusion on grade equivalent scores from the Comprehensive test of basic skills.

Some researchers have chosen to look at the problem from the reverse perspective, with interesting results. Instead of examining the effect that introducing a new parent involvement program has on particular students or a school generally, they have taken groups of high and low achieving students and studied the different in how their families and schools have behaved. Benson questioned families of 764 sixth graders about how they spend their

time and found that children with parents who engage them in educational activities tend to do better in school, even if they are from very disadvantaged backgrounds(1980). On the flip side of this observation, Rankin, (1967) found that high achievers are much more likely to have active, interested, and involved parents than low achievers. It has been suggested by many achievement theorists that parents influence their children's achievement behaviors through both their role as models and their more direct role as expectancy and value socializers.

Many of us know of cases in which the parents were illiterate, yet there children became leaders of the community, doctors, lawyers and other professional occupations. The factor that contributes to the child success, rather, the parent was academically successful or not is the motivation of the parent to the child's achievement and accomplishment. However, (Hess, 1970) alluded that both socioeconomic status variables and parent characteristics have been found to correlate significantly with child mental test scores and academic achievement. This conclusion is contrary to Gatlin's (1976) study that investigated only the academic factors and concluded that there is little relationship between parental status and academic achievement. Gatlin and Brown rationale is that intervening variables such as the quality of the relationship between parents and children may play the more significant part and affect the academic achievement of the children (Gatlin and Brown, 1975).

Several studies have presented theoretical and empirical data on the relationship between social class and the range of values or aspirations. These studies also discuss the practical implications of the findings, since it makes a good deal of difference whether lower-class people are characterized as having merely lower aspirations for their children academic achievement (Rodman, 1966; Rodman et al, 1974; Rodman and Voydanoff, 1978). These studies supports Gatlin's data on parents' educational aspirations for their children based upon a unique sample. The data on a sample of black parents, differentiated by social class and reporting on sons and daughters. Gatlin tested the hypotheses that the width of the range of aspiration does not vary by sex of parent or sex of child and that social class status is inversely associated with the width of the range of the aspirations, simultaneously controlling for sex of parent and sex of child (Gatlin, 1981). Gatlin concluded that regardless of parental socio-economic background the range of aspiration for their children exist on all social levels.

du Bois-Reymond's (1989) study examined how adolescents direct themselves towards the expectations and conduct requirements of their educators during their transition to adulthood. In this longitudinal study lasting 4 years, adolescents, mothers and fathers were interviewed. The first round of interviews showed that the adolescents almost unanimously viewed adulthood as boring. More adolescents reported that their private lives were strongly

supervised by their parents; fewer considered their parents tolerant and indulgent. Neither adolescents nor parents thought lightly of perspectives for the future as far as education was concerned. Parents did not offer a model for life for the subjects.

The standard course of life changes more and more into an individualized course of life (Fuchs 1983; Zinnecker 1987; and Hoerning 1988). Individualization goes hand in hand with a shift in the balance of power between the sexes and between the different generations. Men and women, and youths and adults, are developing new forms of communications which are no longer as strongly characterized by a relation of authority and subordination as they used to be, but rather by association on the basis of equality (De Swann 1982; Du Bois-Raymond 1989; Jonker 1989; Steinberg 1987) De Swaan and others summarized this historic-cultural and mental change in the theorem; from management through demand to management through negotiation. This concept allows for children make their own choices; however, often children make those choices based strongly on the model of the parent. de Bois's study falls under the assumption that a more differentiated and individualized life-plan of youngsters in comparison to their parents would especially concern two aspects of life: work, and starting a relationship and family. Yet he falls short in determining that the decision of the occupation of the child, generally was based upon the occupatin of the parents. However this study does concur that parents offer a model for life to youngsters.

Procedures

Population

The population for this study will include 480 students from the St. Sabina Academy. St. Sabina Academy is a Catholic school under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The school serves grades K-8. This study includes grades third and fourth.

Sample

The sample is from 213 students in grades third and fourth. Permission was given for the students' records to be examined. From the population of 213 students' in grades third and fourth, the school records indicated that 98 of the students parents participated and volunteered for school activities atleast 90% of the time. One-hundred fifteen students had non-participatory parents. Forty students were randomly selected from each of these sub-populations. (The students records were randomly selected using a table of random numbers).

Method of Data Collection:

Each Spring the California Achievement Test (CAT) is administered to each student at the St. Sabina Academy. Two samples were identified from the school records of those students whose parents participated in school activities and non-participatory parents. The mathematics and reading results of the CAT administered during the Spring of the 1989 school year will be used in this study. A posttest only control group design will be used.

Treatment of Data:

The finding will be tabulated in terms of means and standard deviations. The t test will be employed at the .05 level of confidence to determine if there is any statistically significant difference between the mean scores.

Findings of the Study

The samples for the study included third and fourth grade students of the St. Sabina Academy. Two groups were randomly selected from records provided by the school. Subjects in group (A) were students whose parents participated in school activities atleast 90% of the school year. Subjects in group (B) were students whose parents were non-participatory in school activities, atleast 0-3 times a school year. Results from the 1989 CAT Total reading and mathematics test were used as a posttest. A t test ($p < .05$) for independent samples was done on these two sets of scores to determine if there is a statistically significant change in reading and mathematics achievement of children whose parents participate in school activities.

Reading

	(N=40)	(N=40)	
Posttest	Group A	Group B	t
Mean	3.75	3.90	.97
SD	1.15	1.13	

Mathematics

	(N=40)	(N=40)	
Posttest	Group A	Group B	t
Mean	4.55	4.72	.53
SD	.75	.94	

df = 78 p > .05
*significant at the .05 level

Examination of the 1989 posttest scores indicate that Group A and Group B were not significantly different. The A group with a mean of 3.754 in reading and 4.546 in mathematics, and B group with a mean of 3.901 in reading and 4.720 in mathematics concludes that the two groups were both equivalent in reading and mathematics in the Spring of 1989.

The t scores for the A group (.9678) and B group (.5324) results show no significance in achievement over either group.
The data leads to the conclusion of the null hypothesis that **there will not be a significant difference in the academic achievement of students whose parents participate in school activites from those of non-participatory parents.**

The results are surprising in that the review of literature overwhelmingly concluded that parents participation in school activities lead to higher academic achievements for their children. However, Martinez (1981), stresseed the importance of operating jointly on five essential variables that leads to successful academic achievements.

Many researchers have concluded that parental participation must have a particular focus in order to acclaim achievement. The form of parental involvement in education, whether in or out of school, is not important as long as the involvement is well planned, comprehensive and long-lasting and serves to integrate students' experiences at school with those at home. Thus, the null hypothesis is valid if all the variables that produces successful academic achievements are not met.

More research on this subject is needed. A longitudinal study would probably prove to be more effective.

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